Synopsis

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In Search of Humanity: The Bond that Matters in the Selected Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean;

If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty

– Mahatma Gandhi

When pandemics like Covid-19 hit the world, people undergo a lot of sufferings and start losing their faith and values. At such times, they should try to reconnect not only with God and nature, but also with other human beings and realize the need for humanity. This reconnection would help them to understand others and themselves better and to lead their life in a meaningful manner.

Literature is a mixture of reality and imagination focusing on human nature, culture, language and sensibility of people. Some of the major issues dealt in literature are identity crisis, cultural, gender and racial differences. By recording the political, cultural and emotional life of people of the past, it helps people to live their life in a better and meaningful manner.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (1977-), one of the 100 'Most Influential People' born in South-Eastern Nigeria and raised in the influence of Chinua Achebe is one of the powerful writers from Nigeria. She divides her time between Nigeria and the United States of America. She was born to the senior academics James Nwoye Adichie, a retired professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Nsukka and Grace Ifeoma who was the first female registrar (retired) of the same University. Adichie is the fifth child of six children coming from a traditional catholic family. She is a voracious reader and started to read Chinua Achebe even at the age of ten and has been inspired by his writings.

Adichie received many prizes in the University School of Nsukka. She was forced by her father to study medicine and pharmacy in the University of Nigeria, where she edited the university

magazine named ‘Compass.’ Her writing skill made her to quit her medical degree and to move to Drexel University in Philadelphia, the United States of America, on a scholarship to study Communication and Political Science where she published her first collection of poems titled *Decisions*. Her recent published work *Notes on Grief* shows her depression on the loss of her beloved father. She made several contributions to literary journals during her college times. She has published *Decisions* (1977), a collection of poems and “For Love of Biafra”, a short drama in 1978. Her works have been translated into thirty languages. She has dealt with the themes of feminism, racial discrimination, political and cultural issues.

Adichie’s first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) marked her as a prominent writer. She has won numerous prizes and awards for her works that includes ‘Caine Prize’, ‘O Henry Prize’, ‘David T Wong International Short Story Prize’ ‘Commonwealth Writers’ Prize’, and ‘Hurston Wright Legacy Award’. The second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) was awarded various prizes. The title reflects the flag of the short lived Biafra. The novel was made into a Hollywood movie with the same name and was directed by Biyi Bandele. The novel won Orange Broadband Prize for fiction, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and PEN Beyond Margins Award in 2007. The third novel *Americanah* (2013) won Chicago Tribune Heart Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award.

Primary Sources

1. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003)
2. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)
3. *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009)
4. *Americanah* (2013)
5. *Notes on Grief* (2021)

The book *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) is a Ted talk that deals with feminism. It raised many questions regarding the position of women in the society. The epistolary *Dear Ijeawele*: *A feminist manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* is an E-mail written to her friend suggesting to rear a female child.

Adichie was listed as one of 39 writers under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club Project Africa 39, celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO, World Boo Capital in 2014. She was considered 'World's 50 Great Leaders' by Fortune Magazine in 2017. The short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* that consists of twelve short stories was short listed for John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 2009 and Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best Book (Africa) in 2010.

Chapterisation

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Search for Identity

Chapter 3 – Tradition Vs Modernity

Chapter 4 – Women Empowerment

Chapter 5 – Summation

Objectives

- To trace the status of women in the Nigerian society
- To examine the identity crisis faced by the characters in the novels
- To study the conflict that arises between tradition and modernity
- To analyse the ways and means by which women become empowered
- To reiterate the need for human bonding especially during the times of crisis

Thesis Statement

The world is beset by the misuse of science and technology on the one hand and the spread of pandemics like Covid-19 on the other. Hence, it becomes immanent that human beings strive hard to retain their identity, equality and humanity and remain as empowered beings. The present study is an analysis of Adichie's characters and their search for identity overcoming the struggles that ensue because of the conflict between tradition and modernity, and their progress towards empowerment.

Chapter 1- Introduction

Introduction gives an overview of the Nigerian literature with special reference to major women writers like Flora Nwapa - the mother of modern African literature, Buchi Emecheta – the first successful black woman novelist living in Britain after 1948. Adora Lily Ulasi wrote detective fiction in English. Ifeoma Okeke is considered the most important novelist after Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. The common themes of women writers are feminism, women's suffrage, class, gender issues, politics and religion.

Nigerian literature is rich with the fragrance of its ancient tradition and culture as its history embraces the ideas, faiths, living style, beliefs and culture of its inhabitants. With the birth of Nigeria as a separate country, Nigerian literature, with its recorded history emerged. This literature has witnessed more than five decades of its history.

As the Nigerian people started cultivating the mentality of considering the western culture superior and the native as inferior, the Nigerian literature warned its people against their passion for western culture which may later destroy their life and cultural identity. It shows the negative impact of colonialism that tried to destroy the society and culture.

Nigerian literature is an off shoot of African literature and so it cannot be separated from the literary roots of Africa. Nigerian fiction smells rich with its traditional fragrance coming from the major ethnic groups like Hausa-Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the south-west and Igbo in the south-east, tracing the beginning of its people, language, various traditions, culture, food, deities and craft.

Nigeria achieved its political freedom in 1960. Due to the fluctuations of the political stand, Civil War broke out in Nigeria in 1967 which killed a hundred thousands of its soldiers, changes the entire scenario of the people in Nigeria. The writings of Nigerian literary fiction split into three waves. The first wave of Nigerian fiction began with a limited number of fictional works. The works of the period focused on the historical, social, cultural and religious issues of the Nigerian society. Beginning with the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1952, they also portrayed the pathetic experiences of Nigerians during the time of war.

The themes that were included in the first wave such as Nigerian culture, tradition, history, politics, religion and polygamy along with supernatural elements could not be separated from the second wave of literary fusion. A number of novels included in the second wave displayed the status of the new independent Nigeria. The writers of this wave penned the problems of Civil War. Their writings traced the painful troubles of its citizens such as poverty and disease born as the result of the Civil War and the medium of writing reflected the anger and frustration of the people. This period also traced the tensions in Nigerian politics and themes of disillusionment. With the birth of independence of the Nation, corruption became a major theme with the outcome of violence and military coups.

The first novel of Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (1965) marked the second wave of literary fiction with vivid pictures of Civil War, growing corruption in politics and disunity in the society. Through this novel, Wole Soyinka spoke with his fellow Nigerians and warned them against the impending dangers that would ensue independence. Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) was an unflattering portrait of Nigerian independence, corruption and problems of post-colonial Nigerian society. The novel traced the domination of the White colonizers in the mindset of the natives as slaves. The people were treated slaves not directly by the White but in the hands of corrupted politicians. This period is significant with the entry of Flora Nwapa, the mother of modern African literature and Buchi Emecheta. This period remained a continuation of the first wave novelists and positioned itself as a bridge between the first and third wave novelists.

The third wave novels not only reflected the problems of Nigeria, but also of the entire world. The attention was mainly on the conflict between tradition and modern lifestyle and the initial disenchantment with their new leaders. The primary aim has been merely to instruct and create awareness about the false images. Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) skillfully described motherhood as something noble. Nigerian literature that was dominated by men writers began to blossom with the entry of Flora Nwapa. Even after the entry of Flora Nwapa, the works of women were not well accepted in the male dominated society.

The development of women writers in Nigerian literature in English is quite significant because women in their writings present the culture boldly compared to men writers. As women are considered as the candelabrum that lit the lamps of family, tradition, culture, knowledge and the creator, (family, country and literature) the writings automatically focus on the major issues such as cultural changes, racial issues and inequality. The writings of women have gained respect from women at the beginning. Flora Nwapa's works mark the beginning of Women's literature and their achieving recognition. She has changed the negative image of women in Nigerian literature and dominated the literary scene. Many other women writers followed the footsteps of Flora Nwapa and contributed their mite to the growth of Nigerian Literature. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the prominent writers who is still contributing to the development of Nigerian Literature through her fiction and prose works. The present study dealing with the works of Adichie includes the Review of literature -- articles, criticisms and reviews of Adichie's works and criticisms on other writers dealing with similar issues.

Methodology

Adichie's concepts regarding Feminism and Identity are used for the analysis of the works.

MLA Handbook – Eighth edition is followed for documentation.

Chapter 2 – Search for identity

Search for identity deals with the identity crisis faced by Nigerians and their struggles to retain their roots. According to Adichie, being human and being a full person is what really matters: "a self that is honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people." Adichie's characters try to understand their potentiality and themselves. Best example to this equal humanity is Aunt Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*. The atmosphere in the house of Ifeoma is blended with the bond of love and care with freedom and responsibility. Ifemelu in *Americanah* tries to assert herself and makes others free to express their individual opinions freely. Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* do not want to live in the shadow of their rich father Chief Ozobia. Nnamabia in the short story "Cell One" struggles for the rights of an old man whom he has not known before

and Grace in "The Head Strong Historian" learns about the tradition of her country while living in the United States and proudly writes a book titled *Pacifying with the Bullets*: *A Reclaimed history of Southern Nigeria*. She also has changed her name Afamefuna as she finds herself close to her cultural roots.

Chapter 3 – Tradition Vs Modernity

This chapter explores the Igbo tradition and the traditional values of people. It also shows the conflict that ensues between traditional and cultural practices of Papa-Nnukuwu and the modernist, Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*; Odenigbo's mother and Olanna are having differences in their beliefs. Odenigbo's mother who has faith in tradition makes her son to sleep with Amla to have a male child in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The influence of Western Education makes Ifemelu progressive in her thinking. The chapter also brings out the difference between the modern woman Ifeoma and traditional woman Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*. The boldness of Ifemelu and the submissiveness of Kosi in *Americanah* are the best examples for tradition versus modernity. Ifemelu chooses her partner independently whereas Kosi pleads with her husband not to leave her.

Chapter 4 – Women Empowerment

The chapter brings out Adichie's views on feminism that is different from that of others. According to her, "being a feminist is like being pregnant. You either believe in the full equality of men and women, or you do not." Adichie strongly says to women that it is not a man's role to provide. In a healthy relationship, it is the role of whoever can provide to provide. The strong voice insists that women need not conform to the traditional roles ascribed to them and confine themselves. She wants women to be different, progressive, independent and empowered, realising their full potential. The female protagonists of Adichie encounter a lot of difficulties in the course of their journey towards empowerment. Ifeoma of *Purple Hibiscus* takes the right decisions and runs her family despite the loss of her husband and the troubles given by the university people; in the novel *Americanah*, Ifemelu empowers other immigrants through her blog even though she is

much disillusioned at the beginning of her visit to America; In the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Kainene and Olanna, think differently and help the war victims in spite of their hard times.

Chapter 5– Summation

Adichie makes her characters understand their own selves in the course of their search for identity overcoming the struggles that arise due to various conflicts and enables them to understand humanity better and establish proper relationship with others. This human bonding helps in their empowerment and enhances their ability to come out successfully during crises.

Scope for Further Study

Further studies can be conducted on

• The male characters of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

• Narrative techniques of Adichie

• Adichie and social media

• Adichie's Contribution to Afro-American literature

• Adichie and Contemporary Nigerian Women writers

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